

R 091343Z DEC 08
FM AMEMBASSY WINDHOEK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0203
INFO SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L WINDHOEK 000394

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/05/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [WA](#)

SUBJECT: POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN NORTHERN NAMIBIA FORESHADOWS
CONTENTIOUS ELECTION

REF: A: WINDHOEK 0035

Classified By: Ambassador Dennise Mathieu per 1.5 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Namibia's general elections are approximately one year away, but the campaign season is in full swing. After a series of minor political confrontations during the Tobias Hainyeko by-election (reftel), a violent attack on a Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP) rally by supporters of the ruling Southwest Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) in Outapi, a traditional SWAPO stronghold, has revealed a new, more volatile and intolerant tone to Namibian politics. It has also left many wondering if senior government officials are willing to make it clear that political violence from any quarter is unacceptable. Although previous Namibian elections have been relatively peaceful, 2009 may not be if SWAPO views the RDP as a real threat to its longtime hold on power.

Hibernating Politicians

¶2. (SBU) In recent weeks, the political atmosphere in Namibia has become increasingly charged. Acts of political intimidation, which flared during the Tobias Hainyeko by-election, continue to color the political scene. In addition, the SWAPO Party Youth League (SPYL) has strongly criticized cabinet members it accuses of being disloyal to the party. In particular, Minister of Environment and Tourism Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwa, Minister of Safety and Security Dr. Nickey Iyambo, Minister of Works and Transport Helmut Angula, and Minister of Defense Charles Namoloh have been accused by the SPYL of "hibernating" as RDP supporters. A number of political observers believe there is a possibility that President Pohamba, despite having been named SWAPO's flag bearer for the 2009 campaign, either may decide not to run for a second term or may be replaced as the ruling party's candidate by a special party congress. Some have speculated that former President Sam Nujoma is trying behind the scenes to arrange a scenario whereby his son, currently the deputy Minister of Justice, becomes the presidential candidate, but it is unclear how much support such a possibility has within the party.

Outapi

¶3. (SBU) On November 23, eight supporters of the RDP and several police officers were injured when SWAPO supporters prevented the opposition party from holding a rally in Outapi, the regional capital of Omusati, a traditional SWAPO stronghold. SWAPO supporters blocked a main road leading to Outapi until the police persuaded them to remove the roadblock. The crowd reportedly shouted, "Omusati is not an RDP region; it's a SWAPO region," and taunted the RDP members to "go back to Oshana, Ohangwena and elsewhere where you belong." Meanwhile, on another road leading to the rally, a convoy of RDP vehicles escorted by police was blocked by a second crowd of SWAPO members. The protesters, some of whom were allegedly armed with guns and machetes, threw stones at the police and RDP vehicles before pursuing the RDP in a high-speed multi-vehicle chase some 50 kilometers out of town, where the Oshana region police force eventually stopped

the SWAPO convoy.

¶4. (C) Immediately following the incident, questions arose as to why the Outapi police had been out-numbered. Moreover, reports swirled that the Omusati police commander was on leave that weekend, despite the fact that he was aware of the potentially contentious event. In a conversation with Poloff, RDP organizers Libolly Haufiku and Norah Appolus accused SWAPO of orchestrating the attack in advance, citing the large number of people and vehicles assembled. While suspicious of the absent police commander, they were sympathetic with the plight of the police, remarking that they showed no bias to either side, but simply tried to maintain control of the situation.

¶5. (SBU) Also on November 23, in Windhoek's Greenwall Matonga area, another opposition party, the newly-established All People's Party (APP) held a rally that was disrupted by SWAPO demonstrators. The SWAPO branch coordinator for that area admitted to leading the protest, telling reporters that the APP had failed to ask her permission before holding its meeting. Police separated the two groups, and the APP eventually went ahead with its rally.

Provocation, not Condemnation

¶6. (SBU) Members of the RDP and other opposition parties expressed outrage over the Outapi incident. With the exception of a statement to the media by Prime Minister Angula and a public letter by SWAPO elder statesman Andimba Toivo ya Toivo, in which he appealed for tolerance and political maturity and urged party leaders to refrain from demonizing the opposition, SWAPO leaders and senior government officials were largely silent.

¶7. (C) In a December 5 conversation with Ambassador, Toivo ya Toivo elaborated his position. While Namibia had been a star at independence, he lamented that the political atmosphere began to change in 2004. (Note: SWAPO's congress in 2004 was notably contentious. End Note.) He claimed the SPYL and party leaders are responsible for today's political intolerance.

¶8. (SBU) Approached for comment on November 24 by the daily "The Namibian," Prime Minister Angula reminded Namibians to respect the Constitution, which enshrines the right of peaceful political activity. He went on to say, "RDP is organizing rallies wherever they seek publicity, and they do it deliberately (holding rallies in certain areas). They ferry people (to rallies) in cars from far away, and they deliberately provoke. Maybe it is time people should ignore them."

¶9. (SBU) On November 28, President Pohamba made his first public comment regarding the Outapi rally. In an address to SWAPO's central committee, he echoed the Prime Minister's claim that party members were being provoked by "elements who call themselves democrats." Referring to an incident in which a police officer had removed a SWAPO flag during the Tobias Hainyeko by-elections, Pohamba said, "It is unacceptable for a police officer to throw a flag of a political party on the ground," calling it "the highest form of provocation," which could result in violence. He did, however, also call on political parties and the Namibian people to respect the authority of the police and the sanctity of the Constitution.

¶10. (SBU) It was not until December 3 that SWAPO Secretary General and Minister of Justice Pendukeni Iivula-Ithana accepted full responsibility for the events at Outapi, stating that the violence took place "in the colors of SWAPO," and therefore the party would accept responsibility. She stressed to media outlets, however, that party leadership had had nothing to do with the incidents. She also blamed the press for misrepresenting and slandering SWAPO, arguing it chose not to report on a letter by the Ministry of Safety

and Security to Pohamba about the incident. Major newspapers responded by claiming they had never seen the letter. At the press conference, Ivula-Ithana repeated the provocation mantra, "We are fully aware of (the RDP's) agenda, which is to intimidate and provoke our members in view of next year's elections, to render the country ungovernable, and call for the postponement of elections as they usually do."

Blame Game

¶11. (SBU) According to Ivula-Ithana, the aforementioned police report stated there was a lack of communication between the police and the RDP and charged the party with failing to provide details such as the time and place of the rally. It criticized both parties for ignoring police instructions, and it warned that political violence, if allowed to continue, could lead to chaos.

Comment

¶12. (C) The incidents in Outapi and Greenwall Matongo on the heels of the Tobias Hainyeko by-elections represent a new trend of confrontation and intolerance in Namibian politics. Past elections, particularly that of 2004, were contentious, but the scale and nature of the most recent events are of concern. Despite the fact that SWAPO supporters reportedly yelled ethnic epithets and played upon underlying tensions between Ovambo ethnic sub-groups, the violence in Outapi was not ethnic or racial in nature. Rather this confrontation was about winning votes. SWAPO clearly feels threatened by the RDP and the attention it is garnering. The RDP may indeed be provoking SWAPO, but if it is to win seats in the National Assembly, it must gain crucial support from the northern part of the country. SWAPO's reaction to the formation of the opposition party Congress of Democrats (COD) in 1999 was not as aggressive. Further, the COD did not campaign in the Omusati region and was not considered a real threat. There is a strong possibility, however, that the RDP could pull support from SWAPO in Omusati. On a positive note, the opposition has praised police for working hard to maintain order and for not favoring one side over another.

¶13. (C) As to whether SWAPO has lost control of its members, it seems more likely that senior leadership has decided that this a battle better fought by those in the trenches--leaving regional and branch coordinators to defend their districts. It is disappointing that the normally moderate Pohamba has not spoken out forcefully about SWAPO's tactics, but given some of the internal maneuvering within SWAPO over the 2009 elections, he may be feeling pressure to espouse a harder line than he normally wouldbe comfortable with. End Comment.

MATHIEU